

# UCLA SCHOOL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

## SUMMER 2002 INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP INSTITUTES:

### CLASSROOM WALK-THROUGHS

#### *Before, During, and After Walks*

-- Have more difficult  
teacher just observe  
@ first

#### **Preparation**

Prior to Classroom Walk-Throughs, the staff participates in an orientation session to learn about the Walk-Through process, the focus of the Walk-Throughs, who will participate as observers during the Walk-Throughs, and what to expect from the observers. The observation sessions are approximately five – seven minutes, with five minutes between each classroom visit for interim debriefing by the observers.

#### **The Classroom Walk-Throughs**

The participants meet together in a conference room, classroom or library on the day of the Walk-Throughs. The principal, a faculty member, or other stakeholder shares with the group the focus area for the classroom observation, typically by posing a question that clearly frames what observers should notice. If staff has been working on a specific principle, standard or strategy, the work that has been done in that area will be outlined, and this information will provide additional focus for the observations. Participants should review the schedule, any forms for collecting their observations, and the behavioral guidelines that have been shared with the staff. If they aren't known to each other already, they should meet their partners for the observations. If needed, an outside facilitator can assist until participants become more experienced with the process.

#### **Observation Visits**

The Walk-Through observers visit the classrooms and use the forms to make note of what they see and hear in relation to the focus question. Observers will pay attention to what students are doing, the work products that are displayed, the teacher's lesson, and interactions between teacher and students, and students with each other. Observers may ask questions of the students, provided that students are working in such a way that the questioning is not a distraction. Observers should make note of any displays outside of the classroom (hallways, display cases, etc.) that relate to the focus.

#### **Observation Partners' Debriefs**

After each classroom visit, the observation partners talk briefly (away from the classroom) about what they have just heard and seen related to the focus area. This debrief session is intended to serve as a shared reflection of what they've just experienced in the classroom. Different observers will have noticed different aspects of the classroom experience, or will have interpreted things differently. This conversation is not judgmental, and should focus on evidence of what has been observed. (Think of this process as being similar to a Socratic Seminar, where participants are continually referring to the text to support their comments. In this case, the classroom visit is the "text.")

### **Feedback Session**

After all the partnered observers have completed the visitations, they reconvene to discuss observations. The facilitator may have the group take five – ten minutes to review their notes, identify a few key observations they'd like to share, and formulate a question that they're wondering about as a result of the visits. During this session, the observers provide observations they made during the visits. Next, the group offers probing questions (questions designed to push the principal's and other school leaders' thinking – but not leading questions which try to push the thinking in a specific direction). The principal and others do not answer these questions; they listen and take notes without interrupting. (These questions are designed for deeper reflection, not for immediate response or defense.) There should be no point when observers engage in judgmental, evaluative feedback. The facilitator should be conscientious about preventing such comments.

### **Implications for Practice**

After listening to the feedback and the probing questions, the principal talks with the group about where she/he is now in thinking about the focus question. If there is a leadership team with the principal, they will engage in conversation together about their current thinking and their ideas for next steps.

### **Sharing with the Staff**

Feedback from observations noted by the Walk-Through team is shared with staff, either in writing or verbally (depending on the culture of the school). Sometimes, the observers have a fishbowl conversation about what they have seen, with the faculty who were visited listening in. The faculty is then invited to ask clarifying questions as a lead into thinking about implications for practice. Ideas for next steps may be shared, including an invitation for staff to participate in setting goals and designing next steps for faculty learning and practicing together.

### **Next Learning**

Use faculty-wide meetings, grade-level and department meetings, and other regularly occurring settings to engage in inquiry, reflection and dialogue, learning together as professionals, and looking at student work to support refined practices that begin to address the questions raised by Classroom Walk-Throughs.

### **Next Classroom Walk-Through**

The next Walk-Through should focus on assessing what is happening as a result of the strategies or approaches implemented because of the learning from and following the current Walk-Through.

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### *Protocol for Use with the NCEE Focused Walk*

#### **NOTES:**

A NCEE† Focused Walk is a valuable tool for planning and monitoring progress towards the establishment of a standards-based school. However, before this tool can be used effectively, there are background understandings and conditions that should be arrived at and disseminated from within the school or district in order to reduce some of the tensions that may arise otherwise.

#### **Background Understandings**

- The NCEE Focused Walks are based on Standards and Principles of Teaching and Learning.
- A Focused Walk should be used first to gather baseline information and then monitor and help inform progress towards the establishment of a standards-based school and classroom.
- A Focused Walk should be focused on positive collaborative self-assessment by a school team, district team, or individual staff member, not a negative one-sided evaluation.

#### **Purpose**

A specific purpose for each Focused Walk should be established and communicated to all “stakeholders.” Possible purposes:

- Gathering baseline information for the planning process.
- Monitoring progress towards implementation of an action plan.
- Focusing and celebrating successes in a specific area.
- Highlighting areas that will need further improvement.
- Self-assessment by individuals or groups.

#### **Participants**

Selection of participants for the Focused Walk will depend on the purpose or focus of the walk. Teachers, staff members, parents, administrators, students, Board of Education members, or representatives of community organizations may at some point be included. The caution, of course, is that participants in the Focused Walk need to be fully informed of the philosophy and purpose of the Focused Walk.

#### **Ground Rules of the Walk**

Standing ground rules or a protocol for the walk should be developed and communicated prior to the Focused Walks. These ground rules will depend, in part, on the culture and policies in existence in the school. Examples of ground rules that may enhance the effectiveness of the Focused Walk include:

†National Center on Education and the Economy

- Participants will refrain from any judgmental comments during the Walk.
- The agreed-upon time schedule will be strictly honored.
- Participants will respect the learning environment in classrooms (not disturbing or talking together).
- Participants will check as to teacher preference for inside-class or outside-class questioning of students.

### **Communications About the Walk**

Open communications about the Focused Walk are crucial to the success and effectiveness of the Walk. There is bound to be apprehension about an initial Walk, and while a certain amount of tension is important to growth, too much will lead to rejection of the findings and controversy about the process itself. Clear and open communication before, during, and after the Walk is suggested.

### **Briefing**

- Both participants in the scheduled Walk and the staff of the school should be fully informed as to the focus, purpose, and ground rules of the Walk.

### **Focused Walk**

- Participants and staff must adhere to ground rules decided on for the Walk at all times.

### **Debriefing**

- The participants will meet to discuss their findings... What evidence of standards-based teaching and learning were in place? Which need a standards focus? And which were not yet evident?
- A report of the finding should always be communicated orally or in writing to the staff, individually or in groups.
- Findings and other observations are confidential and not discussed beyond the agreed-upon audience.

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### *Guidelines for Giving Feedback*

#### NOTES:

After the classroom walk-throughs, the observers reconvene to discuss their observations. This feedback session is structured to be informative, not evaluative. Evaluation and judgment promote defensiveness rather than learning. The session begins with observations and moves to questioning. The following guidelines help the session stay on course.

#### **When citing observations:**

- Be descriptive, not judgmental.
- Stick with what can be seen or heard.
- Avoid words that imply good vs. bad or right vs. wrong.
- Be specific – State who, what, when and to whom.
- Focus on what they do, not who they are.

#### **When forming and asking questions:**

- Make them straightforward, clear and singular (one at a time).
- Ask genuine questions that reflect what you wonder about and allow her/him to form her/his own answer.
- No leading or multiple-choice questions.
- Do not set up the answer.
- Be clear about your intent:
  - **Clarifying questions** have brief, factual answers. Clarifying questions *are for the person asking them*. They ask “who, what, where, when, and how.” These are *not* “why” questions. They can be answered quickly and succinctly, often with a phrase or two.
  - **Probing questions** help the answerer clarify and expand his or her thinking. Probing questions *are for the person answering them*. They ask “why” (among other things), and are open-ended. They take longer to answer, and often require deep thought.

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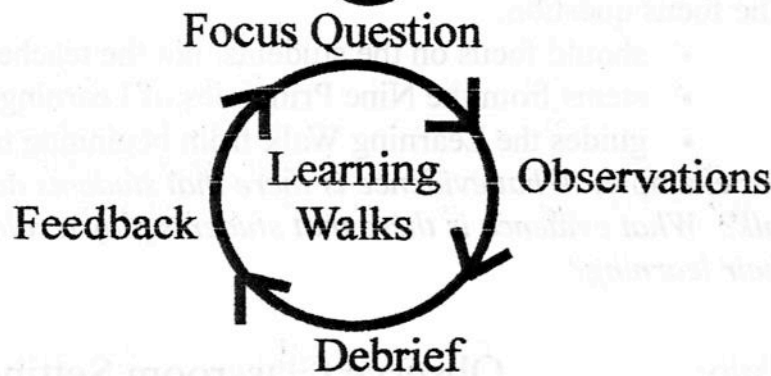
### *Classroom Walk-Throughs Graphic Organizer*

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Subject \_\_\_\_\_ Grade Level \_\_\_\_\_

Focus Question: \_\_\_\_\_

OBSERVATIONS	QUESTIONS – CLARIFYING AND PROBING

# Learning Walks



The goals of Learning Walks are:

- ♦ to become self-reflective.
- ♦ to develop as professional educators.
- ♦ to highlight areas of instruction that need improvement.
- ♦ to improve student learning.

Learning Walks are **not**:

- ♦ formal evaluations of teachers.
- ♦ conducted by the administrator that Stulls that teacher.
- ♦ focused on the teacher, but rather on the student.
- ♦ an open forum for criticism, judgmental observations, or petty comments.

## KEY CONCEPT:

Evaluation and judgment  
promote defensiveness rather than learning.

—therefore—

Learning Walks begin  
with observations and move to questioning.

# The Process of the Learning Walks

## Step One: Formulate a Focus Question

The focus question:

- ♦ should focus on the students, not the teacher.
- ♦ stems from the Nine Principles of Learning.
- ♦ guides the Learning Walk from beginning to end.

For example: *What evidence is there that students actively participate in classroom talk? What evidence is there that students play a role in monitoring and managing their learning?*

## Step Two: Observe Classroom Settings

Observations should be:

- ♦ descriptive, not judgmental.
- ♦ limited to what can be seen or heard.
- ♦ specific (state who, what, when, where, to whom).
- ♦ focused on what is done, not who they are.
- ♦ limited to the area of the focus question.
- ♦ void of words that imply good vs. bad, right vs. wrong.

When observing:

- ♦ If the teacher is involved in a directed lesson, do not interrupt by questioning the students.
- ♦ Do not have conversations with the other observers while in the classroom.
- ♦ Remember that evidence can be in many places: walls/boards, portfolios, students' responses/actions, students' notebooks, student work samples, etc . . .
- ♦ Try not to write down your observations until you leave the room. The activity arouses the curiosity of the students and becomes a distraction.

## Step Three: Debrief

The participants meet to discuss their findings and generate probing questions. A report is generated to share these findings with the staff.

## Step Four: Feedback Session

Observations and probing questions are shared with the staff. From this feedback, the next focus area is chosen.

# Questioning

When participants leave the classroom, they should take a few moments in the hallway to jot down their observations and any questions they may have. Questions are divided into two types, clarifying and probing. Some questions will come to mind right away, others will emerge after some thought, and more will emerge in the debrief process. Generating probing questions is a goal of Learning Walks.

## Clarifying questions:

- ♦ are for the benefit of the **person asking them**.
- ♦ have brief, factual answers
- ♦ are not leading or multiple choice.
- ♦ do not imply that the lesson is weak or the teacher is wrong.

Examples: *What will the assessment be for this lesson? What happens once the group has finished the assignment? When did this project begin?*

## Probing questions:

- ♦ are for the benefit of the **person answering the questions**.
- ♦ require deep thought to answer.
- ♦ are open-ended.
- ♦ lead to reflection about the area of focus.

Examples: *How can we be sure academic rigor is not sacrificed when providing clear expectations? Does engagement equal learning?*

# Belmont High School

## Classroom Learning Walks Graphic Organizer

Date: Feb. 18, 2002 Subject: English, American Lit. Grade Level: 11

Focus Question: What evidence do we see/hear that students know

what is expected of them?

### Observations

-students had a copy of the rubric in their notebooks

-student articulated assignment and standard when questioned

These observations are aligned with the focus question and show evidence. They are appropriate.

-one student was apparently writing a note to her boyfriend during the lesson

-student could not explain the assignment

The first of the observations is outside of the focus area. The second does not show evidence. Remember, the absence of evidence is not evidence. These are inappropriate observations.

### Questions Clarifying and Probing

Do students use this rubric for all of their assignments?

This is a clarifying question. It is meant to provide the observer with additional information.

Why doesn't the teacher do anything to correct the kids who talk without raising their hands?

This question implies that the teacher's practice is wrong, and it is outside of the area of focus.